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19 February 1962

MEMORANDUM FOR : Mr. Richard M. Bissell, Jr.

SUBJECT : Actions Required Regarding DPD Special Projects
Responsibilities

1. Events of the last few days have indicated the necessity for certain basic decisions regarding the continued involvement of CIA in Special Projects which have hitherto been managed or operated on a joint basis between the Agency and the USAF. These projects are principally OXCART, CORONA, and IDEALIST. Because of the importance attached to the first of these three, decisions made with regard to its management, operation, and control could conceivably govern the ground rules for the other two.

2. In the case of Project OXCART, the basic question which must now be answered is as follows:

Will operational control of Project OXCART remain with the CIA, or will it revert to USAF?

When speaking of Project OXCART, we are referring solely to that portion of the A-12 development which deals with the establishment of a capability to conduct clandestine reconnaissance against high priority targets in the USSR. No reference is intended to separate but related Air Force interests in other versions of this aircraft.

3. Up to this point CIA has been concerned in developing, in accordance with methods proven in Project IDEALIST, a systems capability under Project OXCART to accomplish the mission of clandestine reconnaissance set forth above. It has further been our aim to parallel this development with the establishment of operational procedures which would permit command control to be exercised from CIA headquarters in Washington over missions conducted by the OXCART unit in the field. In cooperation with the Air Force, the Agency has assumed primary responsibility for not only monitoring technical development of the basic vehicle and associated systems, but it has also taken the leading role in providing mechanisms for funding of all dollars involved, contracting for all equipment and services to be provided, ensuring maximum security for the entire effort, and serving as a vehicle to

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assimilate Air Force and Agency personnel required in support of the primary mission both in Headquarters and the field. In addition, management of the flight test and operations base has been a primary Agency concern in Project OXCART as was the case at the same location under Project IDEALIST.

4. Perhaps the easiest way to look at the implications of a change in the existing Project OXCART format is to review the various options available to us at this time.

OPTIONS

ADVANTAGES

DISADVANTAGES

- a. Turn Project OXCART in its entirety over to Air Force control.

This move would provide for centralized control of both development and operations under the Under Secretary of the Air Force, who thus far has been concerned principally with support to the Agency on behalf of the Air Force in OXCART and with the development of the [REDACTED] capability.

- (1) Danger of reversion to usual Air Force system of project management calling for wider spread of knowledge and larger numbers of participants as well as costly and time-consuming periodic program reviews.
- (2) Inability, because of heavy workload, of Under Secretary of Air Force to give detailed personal attention to Project OXCART; inevitable delegation of his responsibilities to persons or organizations not familiar with basic concepts of compartmentalization in management and operations.
- (3) Difficulties inherent in surfacing past funding of entire Project.
- (4) Traditional difficulty of military services in peace time in keeping such a project under tight security wraps during conduct of actual operations.
- (5) Interruption of carefully built associations with systems contri

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accustomed to Agency concepts of doing business. Possible loss of time in fielding operational capability.

(6) Likelihood that military services would be prevented from considering employment of limited operational capability prior to full-blown qualification of entire weapons system. Net loss to collection capability of at least one year.

(7) Difficulty of transferring AR responsibilities to military from present form of direction [redacted] primary responsibility with EC&G field support).

b. Retain Project OXCART in CIA with responsibility ending at completion of development phase.

Single source control during critical operational phase with all support elements stemming from one service.

(1) Air Force control of operations would undoubtedly result in Air Force dictation of system development with consequent friction between Agency, Air Force, and contractors in later stages of development phase.

(2) In view fact development probably will not cease with commencement operational phase, resultant difficulty in establishing clear-cut control lines after operations have commenced.

(3) Obvious difficulties in transitioning funding and contract settlement stemming from split management.

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OPTIONS

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| c. Retain Project OXCART under CIA control status quo. | Single source control of both development and operations. Ability of CIA to concentrate on OXCART as a major project, versus OXCART as one of many projects with which Air Force concerned. Obvious advantage afforded by continuity of existing mechanisms for security, contracting, funding, and operations. Valuable experience already in hand in CIA derived from development and operation of IDEALIST and CORONA. | Present apparent lack of strong focal point within CIA for dealings with Air Force on critical and detailed policy problems associated with management and control of OXCART. This deficiency can be corrected. |
| d. Transfer OXCART to Air Force; lend Agency experienced development and operations personnel to Air Force to assist in carrying it to fruition. | Preserves experienced people for important new operation; advantage of single source control of entire project. | (1) Difficulty of transferring authority for covert financing and contracting as well as near impossibility of administering security in accordance with Agency standards.

(2) As result of above consideration, possible disruption of effective management. |

5. In addition to the advantages and disadvantages cited above, the transfer of operational responsibility for Project OXCART to USAF appears to do two important things:

- a. It removes completely the possibility of any plausible denial of U. S. military control and sponsorship of what is essentially a clandestine operation. This could have vastly important political considerations in the event of a flap.

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b. Such a move could be interpreted in Congress as a subterfuge to utilize Agency legislative entitlements in order to circumvent Congressional review of major Air Force expenditures.

Experience in Project IDEALIST, in our opinion, tends to confirm the desirability of disassociating strategic reconnaissance of the sort accomplished in IDEALIST and projected for OXCART from a strict military context which can be interpreted by the opposition as aggressive. With regard to the second question, the Agency's role in the funding and contracting for the OXCART weapons system is susceptible of better defense as long as the ultimate objective is considered to be a clandestine operation. Once the OXCART type of reconnaissance becomes a standard Air Force project, it could be successfully argued that there was no reason for CIA to participate in its development, save for a desire on the part of the service to avoid Congressional restrictions. This, we feel, is most important from the Director's point of view.

6. Should a decision be made to transfer operational responsibility for Project OXCART to the Air Force, it would appear that any reasoning developed in support of this action would necessarily have to be translated into Projects CORONA and IDEALIST, both of which have demonstrated their successful operation under CIA management as clandestine operations. It would not seem feasible or economical to transfer IDEALIST operational control to normal Agency air support entities. There exists at the present time, even within IPD, no visible expertise on IDEALIST in those areas of the Division conducting normal air support responsibilities, since the techniques are vastly different for both these two activities. It is our view that decisions regarding the management and control of IDEALIST and CORONA should logically follow the decision made on Project OXCART. With regard to Project OXCART, it would seem that no advantage possible through transfer of operational responsibility to Air Force could offset the obvious disadvantages inherent in dilution of the present system of single source management now in existence. Should operational control remain with CIA, there would appear to be no advantage in transferring management of the OXCART test and operations site to Air Force for many of the reasons noted under the heading of effective management. While it is true that OXCART cover is now tending to drift more in the direction of apparent DOD control, it is believed that nothing in the make-up of the physical installation as it now exists [REDACTED] is inconsistent with CIA management. The basic fact remains that if an OXCART capability is to be operated effectively as a clandestine tool, it can best be so conducted within the framework of a strong Agency management and operations structure to which Air Force makes valuable contributions in terms of funds, materiel, and skilled operations officers. On the other hand, if it is decided to give operational control

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to the Air Force, the Agency will soon find itself in a difficult position with regard to the ultimate outcome of the Project. If it does succeed under Air Force operation, it will be because that service rescued the Project from the inept CIA; if it fails, it will be because this Agency had so badly run the program that it was beyond salvation at the time Air Force control was assumed.

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[REDACTED]
Acting Chief, DPD-DD/P

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